



Be An Informed Donor

To ensure that your donation goes to a legitimate charity, give wisely. The following tips are designed to protect you from unwittingly donating to a fraudulent charity or fund-raising organization.

Investigate Before You Donate

Do not donate if a solicitor:

- Cannot or will not answer basic questions about the charity.
- Uses high-pressure tactics to obtain your donation.
- Insists on payment by cash rather than check.
- Insists on sending someone to pick up your donation rather than letting you mail it in.

If you would like to donate to an organization, keep the following tips in mind:

- Give only to a group you know and are confident will use the money wisely.
- When paying by check, write out the full name of the organization—do not use initials.
- Never pay in cash.
- If you want to make a tax-deductible donation, make sure you get a receipt for the amount of your contribution with a statement guaranteeing that the contribution is tax deductible.
- If you receive “gifts” such as labels or note cards in mailings from solicitors, you are under no obligation to contribute and may keep any unsolicited merchandise without donating.

Get It In Writing

Ask the organization to send you written information, including the charity’s name, address, telephone number and other financial information.

Don’t Be Rushed or Pressured Into Making a Donation

Legitimate charities will provide you with all the information you need to feel confident before making your donation. Ask questions, gather information and donate only when you are satisfied that your money will be used in ways you consider appropriate.

Listed below are some important questions to ask before donating:

- What is the charity’s exact name? Where is the charity headquartered? How long has the charity been in operation? Does it have local offices? What is the address and phone number of its local and national offices?
- Is the charity registered with the Illinois Attorney General’s office?
- What percentage of the money the charity takes in goes to fund-raising? What percentage to administration? What percentage to the charitable program? (Under the Charitable Trust and Solicitation Acts, charities and professional fund-raisers are required to disclose, upon request, the percentage or hourly rate of contributions that go to professional fund-raisers and solicitors and the percentage that actually goes to the charity.)
- What is the primary purpose of the charity? What programs does it offer in your community?
- Is the solicitor a volunteer or a professional fund-raiser? If the solicitor is a professional fund-raiser, how much of each contribution does the fund-raiser retain? Is the fund-raiser registered with the Illinois Attorney General’s office?
- Will the charity provide a current financial report?

Pay Close Attention to the Group's Name

Some groups choose organization names similar to well-known charities in an attempt to mislead donors. Be careful of solicitations by charities that have unfamiliar names or do not have programs in Illinois.

Police, Firefighter and Professional Fund-Raiser Solicitations

If a solicitor claims to represent the police or fire department, contact your local law enforcement or firefighting agency to verify that they are conducting a fund-raising campaign. The following are some things to think about when considering donating to police, firefighters and organizations employing professional fund-raisers:

- Some police and firefighter organizations are not charitable but instead are unions or social groups that will not use your donation for charitable purposes.
- "Advertising" in so-called "ad books" will probably not reach the general public, and usually less than 20% of the money you contribute benefits the police, firefighters or community.
- Police officers and firefighters never know you contributed.
- Any coercive statement, direct or subtle, that infers that giving is a way to get better protection or special treatment is a crime and should be reported to the respective police department, the State's Attorney and the Attorney General's office.
- Professional fund-raisers often charge 80 to 90% of your contribution as a fee. Consider funding volunteer organizations.

How to Report Charity Fraud

Whenever possible, keep notes on suspicious solicitations. Write down the name of the organization and the solicitor. Try to remember the "pitch" as well as any other information you think important.

You can call 312-814-2595 (TTY: 312-814-3374) to find out if a charity or professional fund-raiser is registered with the Attorney General's office. Possible fraud can be reported to any of the Attorney General's main or regional offices around the state.

If you would like to obtain records, you may request them by writing:

Office of the Attorney General
Charitable Trust Bureau
100 West Randolph Street
Chicago, IL 60601